

**VERMONT RAIL COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
5<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR BOARD ROOM  
NATIONAL LIFE BUILDING  
MONTPELIER, VERMONT  
December 2, 2009**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Scott Rogers (Chairman)

John Cook	Rick Moulton
Dave Wulfson	Dave Allaire
George Barrett	Chris Andreasson
Charlie Moore	Joann Erenhouse
Mike Coates	Carl Fowler
Rep. Bill Aswad	

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joe Flynn, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Charlie Miller, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Bob Atchinson, VTrans Rail Operations Section  
Scott Bascom, VTrans  
Jim McCarthy, VTrans  
John Wilson, Jacobs Engineering  
Mary Anne Michaels, VRS  
Chris Parker, VRAN  
Matt Levin, VCE  
Dave Crawford, Essex Junction Village Manager  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
J. Jeffrey Munger, Sen. Sanders Office  
Paul Craven, consultant  
Ted Brady, Sen. Leahy's Office  
Ron Ferrara, Law Office of Anthony Otis  
Allison Demag, RRAV  
Roger Thompson, FHWA  
Karen Songhurst, VTrans  
Anthony Otis, Otis and Brooks, PC  
Michelle Boomhower, CCMPO  
Michael Pracht, U.S. Railcar, LLC  
R. A. Currier, N.H. Central Railroad

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**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

Scott Rogers called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Introductions were made.

**2. Public Comments**

*Public Comment Section*

Jeff Munger spoke in support of allowing public comment during the regular agenda.  
Matt Levin expressed hope that the spirit of congeniality that prevailed in the past and

was much appreciated will continue. Scott Rogers explained the reason for the ‘public comment’ section is to allow time for discussion and debate among the Rail Council.

*Washington County Railroad & Rail Advocacy Network*

Anthony Otis urged everyone to attend the meeting on the Washington County Railroad and support the rail advocacy network.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

*September 2, 2009*

**MOTION by Dave Allaire, SECOND by Charlie Moore, to approve the 9/2/09 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

**4. Passenger Topics**

*Ridership/OTP*

Charlie Miller reported ridership on the Vermonter through October (the first month of the new contract) is up 1.9% and up 3.3% on the Ethan Allen Express. Revenue is a slightly behind, but this is expected to balance out in the next few months. On time performance (OTP) has been excellent for both services.

Carl Fowler asked about Amtrak’s equipment acquisition program and the availability for coaches for corridor services. Bill Hollister, Amtrak, stated Amtrak is hoping to secure coaches for corridor services within two years. Some cars are being refurbished. Mr. Fowler commented the low slung double decker cars like those used in New Jersey would be very appropriate for Vermont. The cars are push/pull potentially eliminating the need for a second locomotive. Mr. Hollister cautioned the cars may not fit Amtrak’s mode, but there is agreement capacity could be doubled on one car.

*\$12 In-State Fare*

Charlie Miller reported the \$12 in-state fare was not a tremendous success due to the inability to market the service. There was interest in the fare in the fall, 2009, and Amtrak has been asked to continue the fare until 12/16/09. Rick Moulton mentioned he knows of an individual using the service to commute from Waterbury to Brattleboro.

*Castleton Depot*

Staff reported the platform has been relocated to the east end of the building to align with an ADA ramp. A yellow stripe will be painted on the platform. Also, there is a shed for storage of the ADA lift. Thanks are extended to Dave Wulfson and Vermont Railway as well as VTrans district crews for their efforts on the station. The contract lease with Amtrak still needs to be settled (target date is 12/14/09 to begin service if the lease is complete with Amtrak and Vermont Railway). Bill Hollister stated notification, pricing, and fares have been addressed. The service is totally contingent on the lease with the station owner and Amtrak with concurrence by the State of Vermont. Once the agreement is signed Amtrak can begin service. Fair Haven has been notified. There will be a transition period of a week where passengers will continue to be picked up at Fair Haven before eliminating that stop. Passengers seeking reservations will be informed of the stop at the Castleton station. Fair Haven is a “stop restricted” station, Castleton is not. Mike

Coates urged getting the service established as soon as possible to accommodate the area colleges for semester break.

### *Advertising*

Television advertisements for Amtrak service to be shown on WCAX were viewed. The consultant is also assisting with determining the best way to spend marketing/advertising funds. Television commercials directed to instate residents, Vermont Life magazine ads, radio, print, and notifying colleges are some options. Dave Wulfson stressed the importance of talking to Addison County Regional Transportation (bus service) as the bus could transport passengers to the Castleton train station. Carl Fowler suggested having a work session to review a matrix of services in the state. With a little modification there could be connection to the Ethan Allen Express. The consultant should investigate travel ideas around the New York theatre, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and day trips in Vermont. Mr. Fowler urged “getting a better bang for the buck” with the in-state media advertising versus national magazines. Advertisements should be specific to the route and what is being sold. Scott Rogers suggested discussion of the matrix of services could be a task assigned to the Passenger Rail Subcommittee.

**MOTION by Dave Wulfson, SECOND by George Barrett, to recommend the Passenger Rail Subcommittee address logistics (i.e. bus and other connecting modes of transportation) and advertising ideas at the next meeting with a specific mission.**

**DISCUSSION:** Charlie Miller stated radio and print ads are focused in-state. There is no out-of-state advertising. Vermont Tourism & Marketing handles Amtrak advertising and promotion. Amtrak marketing funds are directed at activity within the state and promotion of use of the lines within Vermont. Rick Moulton recommended the Passenger Rail Subcommittee develop a synergy with partners (colleges, bus services, ski areas) and they can help with publicity. Dave Allaire observed the new legislative session and new transportation budget will look at how to better utilize existing services. George Barrett suggested the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing join the study group. Charlie Miller clarified VDTM concentrates on attracting people into the state. VTrans is promoting the use of Amtrak in the state with the marketing funding. Charlie Moore stressed combined resources is the key. The Vermont Rail Action Network should get involved as should people from Castleton and Middlebury. Carl Fowler spoke positively of the television ads, noting the tight focus, and suggested keeping the focus on people likely to use Vermont trains. Mr. Fowler asked about e-ticketing for Amtrak. Bill Hollister said e-ticketing has been abandoned in Maine for now, but market testing may occur in the summer of 2010. Mr. Fowler urged putting train service in the northeast corridor (Adirondack, Maple Leaf, Ethan Allen Express, Vermonter) into a commissionable pool so travel agencies will promote ticket sales. Bill Hollister explained commissioning has been eliminated due to internet sales. E-ticketing is needed though. There was further discussion of commissioned trains and connection with bus services. Mr. Fowler urged using \$5,000 of marketing money to send VTrans rail personnel to attend the National Tourism

**Association and American Bus Association conventions to present a matrix of trains that could work with motor coach tours. Scott Rogers suggested the Passenger Rail Subcommittee discuss Mr. Fowler's suggestion. There were no further comments.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

Charlie Miller mentioned the viral ad being developed for the internet to reach the younger, college population.

#### *Montreal to Burlington*

Joe Flynn listed issues associated with service from Montreal to Burlington, including the border crossing (New York estimated a cost of up to \$60 million for a border crossing facility), cost of train operation (60 miles adds 50% to the cost), crew changes (not a problem any longer), Canadian and U.S. entities (Canadian National Railroad, U.S. Border Service, Canadian Pacific Railroad, Canadian Border Service), the train station in Montreal (train must come in under electric power to Central Station), and other items (offsetting the cost of the train with revenues and buy-in from all entities). There was discussion of run times, overnight trains, and additional frequencies. Scott Rogers said the state is fact finding. Charlie Moore requested information be provided to the Passenger Rail Subcommittee. Mr. Moore asked what will happen if stimulus money is used for a high speed rail corridor from Boston to Montreal. Jeff Munger stated there would be an amendment to the Department of Homeland Security bill to study train crossings into Canada. According to the Port Director Customs and Border Protection prefers to clear trains in the station. Bill Hollister said regarding service on the Adirondack to Montreal the Canadian Border Service tasked Amtrak by November 2010 to have a permanent facility in place where passengers and luggage can be inspected off the train. The Vancouver scenario is a possible solution. Cost estimates for a permanent facility are up to \$60 million. New York does not have the funding to help and Amtrak does not have funding currently in place. The best case scenario is having a facility in Central Station. Carl Fowler observed the level of scrutiny with rail is not done on airlines and it is having a negative impact on passengers.

#### *Passenger Rail Subcommittee Report*

Charlie Moore stated matters discussed by the subcommittee were already covered during the Rail Council meeting.

### **5. Infrastructure Topics**

#### *Middlebury Spur*

Record of Decision is anticipated on the Federal Environmental Impact Study. There is an appeal period. There is a meeting in January with Vermont Rail Systems and OMYA to discuss how to advance the project.

#### *White River Junction Station Sale*

It was noted the property is ideal for a multi-modal facility. In addition, access to state-owned land that is presently landlocked by the river and the station would be gained. Vermont Rail Systems has access to the property inside the wye on a month-to-month

basis since beginning operation of the Connecticut River line. The visitor center is also on a monthly lease. Options for the property are being discussed with the property owner, Byron Hathorn. The property is not yet on the open market. Dave Wulfson suggested Amtrak use lease money as an advance for financing or paying the full lease in advance. Charlie Miller noted the lease is up for renewal in 2010. Users of the station should be able to make a deal with the station owner. Carl Fowler pointed out the location is key to multi-route destinations.

#### *Ethan Allen Express North to Burlington*

Charlie Miller reported work on the rail line is mainly between Florence and Rutland, not up to Burlington. Work north to Burlington is not in the 2010 budget. The state is depending on stimulus funding to complete the project. Rick Moulton recalled the previous Rail Director indicated money for the Essex Jct. proposal could not be provided so the funds could be available to the state to finish the connection (to Burlington). Chris Andreasson clarified the money was to address the 286,000 bridge issue. Charlie Miller said improvements are specified in the stimulus application. There may be enough funding remaining to possibly run Amtrak to Burlington. Paul Craven asked if the Clough Harbour report on track conditions is complete. Mr. Miller said the report is 93% complete. Carl Fowler asked about Vermont's standing in the stimulus application process. Jeff Munger said the applications are still being evaluated. Vermont has good applications. The money is divided into thirds with one third for the Northeast, one third for the Midwest, and one third for the West Coast. Mr. Fowler expressed concern about the recall of unspent earmarks. Jeff Munger said there is discussion of a two year transportation bill being funded with unspent money. Carl Fowler stressed the importance of getting contracts signed as soon as possible and establishing passenger rail service to Burlington even if the train is not traveling at top speeds. Charlie Miller stated if stimulus money is not received there will not be the class level railroad needed to run service in a timely manner from Burlington to Penn Station. The service would be in the same timeframe as the Vermonter service. Jeff Munger stressed Amtrak does not want a train of sub-par performance. Dave Allaire commented a positive statement from the state saying the goal is to initiate passenger rail service is needed and not pending stimulus money or the Middlebury spur project. Carl Fowler opined there can be a respectable service with respectable travel time of two hours or less. There is need to get the service running. Once routinely operating the support will line up. Dave Wulfson spoke in support of running a train wanted by customers.

#### *Project Status Report*

J.B. McCarthy reviewed a document listing projects by name, scope, project manager, estimated cost, funding, and anticipated bid date. There are 60 rail projects for inclusion in the project development system. Announcement was made that the Project Management Engineering position has been filled. Carl Fowler asked about the continuous welded rail application. Charlie Miller said there were two areas, one six miles in length and one seven miles in length. Dave Wulfson said track speed is 25 mph in some areas and 40 mph in others. Continuous welded rail was used to address the worst sections first and those with the greatest amount of traffic. There is some jointed rail between Burlington and Vergennes which is an issue for Amtrak. Following

discussion there was agreement information on the current status of a project should be provided. Dave Wulfson suggested using the worksheet used by the Infrastructure Subcommittee to make recommendations to VTrans, rather than providing a snapshot of projects. Also, there are projects in the Governor's budget that are not included on the list. These projects should be shown. Scott Rogers agreed a list of all projects in the approved program as well as progress to date can be provided. Joann Erenhouse suggested the projected substantial completion date be shown as well. John Cook said projects potentially impacted by earmarks if recalled should be indicated. Paul Craven pointed out the budget is on the webpage and the money amount is a total, not just for design as indicated under the project status category.

Paul Craven gave an update on the Alburgh trestle bridge. Upgrade of the timber trestle is done (\$1.4 million). Construction of the swing bridge will begin May 2010 (\$1.7 million).

Mary Anne Michaels reported on ties, ballast, and rail installed south of Rutland (CLP).

#### *Infrastructure Subcommittee Report*

Information discussion by the Infrastructure Subcommittee already covered at the Rail Council meeting.

### **6. Freight Topics**

#### *WACR Traffic Potential*

Dave Wulfson reported discussions continue regarding rail transport of granite waste blocks. There are some safety issues to address. Pedestrians and bicyclists have been using the rail corridor. Track improvements will have to be done. Crossings are being assessed. Meetings with the town are scheduled. It is anticipated the project may happen in the next three years. Charlie Moore suggested using side dump cars to transport the stone. Carl Fowler mentioned consideration needs to be given to the potential number of jobs created in the Barre/Montpelier community separate from the railroad. Also, the state has spent much money to retain the railroad over the years. George Barrett noted money will be needed to rebuild 11 miles of the track if a contract is set. Matt Levin stated the City of Montpelier would like to have a conversation about the project and get some questions answered. There are concerns about the railroad going through downtown parking lots. Anthony Otis noted community access TV will record the proceedings of the public meetings on the matter in Montpelier.

### **7. Stimulus Application Update**

The Rail Council received information on HSIPR and TIGER grant applications and status.

### **8. Rail Council Focus Groups**

The following results are from the focus group discussions:

- Provide project status update and how this fits with the multi-year plan
- Provide project delivery matrix
- Use Rail Council members in the legislative session

- Seek to fill vacancies on the Rail Council
- Rail Council meeting agendas are too full with not enough time for discussion
- Limit presentations at Rail Council meetings
- Hold one or two Rail Council meetings per year in locations other than Montpelier
- Keep the Rail Council up to speed on public announcements
- Have Rail Council members participate in the interview process to fill vacancies in the Rail Division
- Survey responses are compiled and analyzed

## **9. Other Business**

### *Draft Western Corridor Transportation Plan*

Michelle Boomhower, CCMPO, summarized the draft western corridor transportation plan (multi-modal transportation plan). Comment period ends 1/6/10. The plan is meant to complement other activities the state undertakes relative to transportation modes. Dave Wulfson suggested the effect of the Rte. 17 Champlain Bridge on the western corridor should be included.

### *Spending Stimulus Funds*

Paul Craven asked the process for spending stimulus funds that are secured. Charlie Miller explained a cooperative agreement will be signed. Funds are available for the project only.

### *Charlie Miller's Retirement*

Carl Fowler commented positively on the depth of institutional knowledge and accomplishments of Charlie Miller as a steady, quiet, remarkable asset to the State of Vermont.

**MOTION by Carl Fowler, SECOND by George Barrett, that the Vermont Rail Advisory Council in the following concurrent resolution thank Charlie Miller for his many years of continued service to the Rail Division of VTrans and his tireless efforts to preserve, promote and grow the rail industry in the State of Vermont:**

**Whereas, The Council advises the Agency of Transportation on statewide rail issues, including enhancing freight railway service and examining rail passenger services and the availability of passenger station facilities. The Council also serves as a forum for those interested in rail related issues, and**

**Whereas, Charlie Miller served at the Vermont Agency of Transportation for nine years both in the capacity of AOT Rail Planning Coordinator and AOT Rail Director, and**

**Whereas, in his capacity as an Agency of Transportation employee, Charlie Miller worked tirelessly with the Vermont Rail Advisory Council on a myriad of important and complex issues always with the utmost professionalism, and**

**Whereas, during Charlie Miller's tenure the condition of rail infrastructure in the State of Vermont improved dramatically, and**

**Whereas, Charlie Miller retires with a record of real accomplishments,**

**Therefore, be it resolved by the Vermont Rail Advisory Council that the Vermont Rail Advisory Council thanks Charlie Miller profusely for his many years of service to the rail community and wishes him the best in his retirement.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The Rail Council signed the resolution. Charlie Miller expressed his appreciation and added the work of the Rail Council is significant.

**10. Next Meeting/Agenda Items**

Next Meeting: ~~February 10, 2010. Location to be announced.~~ UPDATE: Due to scheduling problems on the 10th, the next meeting will be held February 03, 2010, 1:00 – 4:00 PM, in the AOT 5<sup>th</sup> floor Board Room , National Life Building, Montpelier.

**11. Adjournment**

**MOTION by John Cook, SECOND by George Barrett, to adjourn the meeting.**

**VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 4 p.m.

*RScty: M.E.Riordan*